

Speech by Sir Jonathan Mills
President of the EFFE International Jury

EFFE Award Ceremony, 18 September 2017
Bozar – Center for Fine Arts Brussels



Ladies and Gentlemen, good afternoon. On behalf of the jury of the Europe for Festivals – Festivals for Europe initiative I bid you welcome to this event.

I would like to congratulate most sincerely all those festivals that have been recognised with special distinction whether with the accolade of laureate status or with the additional recognition of an award.

I would like to thank my fellow jurors, Tamar Brüggeman, Peter Florence, Ong Keng Sen, Haris Pašović, Pawel Potoroczyn, Renato Quaglia, Irene Rossi and Fruzsina Szép; as well as Kathrin Deventer and her most dedicated team at the European Festivals Association for their extraordinary advocacy and support for EFFE.

I would like to acknowledge the hospitality of Paul Dujardin and the Palais des Beaux Arts – Bozarts.

The festival scene throughout Europe is rightly admired across the world for its diversity, its ingenuity and its authenticity.

During our deliberations on behalf of this important initiative, the members of the EFFE jury had the privilege and pleasure of discovering the myriad achievements and ambitions of festivals throughout Europe.

Europe is a festival continent. The sheer number of festivals throughout Europe – it is claimed that they number close to 40,000, though the EFA has direct contact with about 10,000 of them – took even those of us with considerable professional knowledge by surprise.

The implications of these statistics are staggering.

Let me provide some examples;

The Netherlands is a small country with 17 million habitants. We were all amazed to discover that it has an official listing, through various Dutch government and NGO cultural and tourism agencies and websites, of approximately 1000 festivals, meaning one festival per 17.000 people.

Finland, also a small population, with a renowned music education system, is similarly blessed. It has over 100 professional festivals, with audited total attendances of 2.3 million visits. As Finland's total population has 5.5 million inhabitants, it is likely that on average 50% of the entire population visits a festival at least once every year.



The same is true for Malta, which proudly boasts 25 arts festivals for a population of 440,000 citizens.

And what about the phenomenon that is Edinburgh in August?

Founded in the immediate aftermath of World War II, and celebrating their 70th anniversaries last month, the popular success of both the Edinburgh International Festival and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe have been copied almost everywhere else in the world. Festivals as far away as Sydney and Singapore owe their existence to the example set by Edinburgh in 1947.

There are now 9 festivals held in Edinburgh in summer. In addition to the Edinburgh International Festival and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, they are the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, the Edinburgh International Book Festival, the Film, the Jazz, Television and Art Festivals; the most recent addition to the family being a biennial festival of Politics.

This year between them, Edinburgh's Summer Festivals issued approximately 3 million tickets for an estimated attendance of 1 million visitors and residents; some 25,000 professional and amateur artists participated in 40,000 performances of 5,000 separate productions across 400 venues; all together combining for an economic impact of £185 million.

All of this achieved in a city of 450,000 inhabitants, with indifferent weather and no specially provided festival infrastructure

While on the subject of economic impact, the jury of EFFE were delighted, though hardly surprised to discover that on average a €1 investment in a festival yields a €10 return. For the sceptical among you, I would refer you to the vast range of studies that are available from EFA and the European Commission on the economic impact of Europe's festivals.

I do not even start speaking about the effect of festivals on social cohesion, on urban development, and most important of all, on the well-being of citizens throughout the length and breadth of Europe; nor of the many thousands of artists and arts professional who earn their livings from their dedicated and enthusiastic promotion and presentation, production and artistic direction of myriad festivals for audiences from all over the world.

If I am permitted, I would like to extrapolate on the implications of some of the facts and figure that I have just offered.

Let's assume that on average, 1000 people participate in every festival in Europe. Although I think this number is quite conservative, let's not be too extravagant with our assumptions. And if there are 40.000 festivals in Europe, this means that 40 million people visit a festival every year, an average of 110.000 people each day.

Quite some fact, but what a feat! Of goodwill, organizational ingenuity and creative impetus.

We live in a world that faces huge challenges; exploding population growth, diminishing natural resources, vanishing indigenous cultures, increasing tribalism and bitter localised feuds, human dislocation of unprecedented dimensions, terrorism that has rapidly become miniaturised and ubiquitous in its methods; a world of large-scale suffering from easily preventable or treatable diseases.



These are both complex and exciting times in which to live in Europe; times which demand a commitment to our sense of community.

A festival is an expression of the creative ambition of the community it serves. At the same time it is a place where the personal and collective challenges we face as a society can be explored; explored by artists working across and beyond the very boundaries which often seem so difficult to bridge, especially for politicians and bureaucrats.

Of all the volumes spoken about Europe, perhaps the wise words of Carl Bildt, a former Prime Minister of Sweden, carry special resonance.

He said in 1992;

“It was not until the barbed wire was cut on the border between Hungary and Austria, the wall came down in Berlin . . . that the lights started to come on again throughout Europe.

The European nightmare between 1914 and 1989 was coming to an end. Europe could start anew.

What has been achieved since then has been remarkable in every single aspect.”

I could go on, but this is not a history lecture, nor a political manifesto. Though to be sure the cast of characters, the twists and turns of the plots, the shifts in rituals and ideologies all combine to make a truly fascinating grand narrative . . . Europe has had it all.

I think that I speak for all the members of the Jury of EFFE when I say that I learnt a great deal from the very stimulating process of investigating and assessing the richness of Europe’s festivals.

I was constantly reminded of the achievements of many thousands of artists, whose work demonstrates a commitment to the communities in which they live and work; and which contributes so potently to an understanding of the places from which they draw their imaginations.

More than this, I am encouraged by the very personal circumstances, the private challenges, which motivate these remarkable individuals and their ideas.

I would like to think that an occasion such as this ceremony might be a wake up call to our national, regional and civic leaders, in acknowledgement of the sheer size and scope of the success of Europe’s festivals.

At a time when some of the most fundamental assumptions about the safety and security of cities and communities throughout Europe are being challenged in unusual and troubling ways, Europe’s Festivals and their 40 million participants stand as an assertion of our common right to peaceful congregation; our delight in exploring the richness of our own culture and those of many other nations, religions and peoples; and a determination to ensure that the



arts offers all of humanity an enduring legacy of optimism and hope, even in the face of the most powerful, existential challenges.

Culture is a prism through which to perceive the equilibrium of any society. The value of the arts has an inestimable impact on the vibrancy of the world we create.

Ladies and Gentlemen please join me in congratulating the artists, impresarios and audiences of the 715 European Festivals that have been acknowledged with the EFFE label this year, together with the 26 Festivals to have been selected for special mention as 'laureate festivals.

We honour you. We take great delight in this small recognition of your considerable accomplishments; just as we all know so well, the delight you offer audiences - each and every one of us – as we assemble in freedom in a multitude of different concert halls, theatres, plazas, open air venues, both large and small, ancient and modern, purpose built and improvised, in joyful celebration of our shared humanity.

Thank you.

Jonathan Mills,
Brussels, 18 September 2017

